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THE FOURTH GOSPEL:

AN OUTLINE FOR THE STUDY OF ITS HIGHER CRITICISM.

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To the student of the New Testament no questions are more important or vital than those pertaining to the genuineness and authenticity of John's gospel. Did John the evangelist write the Gospel usually ascribed to him? Is the evidence of the centuries convincing on this point? And does the testimony of the book itself corroborate what the church has claimed? Are there incompatible divergences between John's account of the life of Christ and the account given by the other three evangelists? Do the other writings of John, his epistles and the Apocalypse, weaken or strengthen our confidence in the Gospel? For a half-century about these issues discussion has been rife. Practically conclusions have been reached, and yet, although bringing little new matter, the old queries arise. The student needs to review the field and think through the thoughts of others for himself. "The defense of the Fourth Gospel has become in large measure the defense of historic Christianity," says Prof. Riddle.

Seven definite topics may be suggested for the student's investigation. Let him grapple with these resolutely and patiently and he will not only learn much about this spiritual Gospel and much concerning the methods and results of higher criticism as applicable to all parts of the New Testament, but will also confirm his faith in the historic Christ, and will attain an insight into many conditions of the early centuries which will do much to make plain to his appreciation the salient, essential features of our Christian religion divested of some of its late accretions.

Books of reference. Many would be helpful, but a few will suffice. Three seem indispensable: The Bampton Lectures for 1890, entitled "Modern Criticism Considered in its Relation to the Fourth Gospel," by Archdeacon H. W. Watkins; "The Fourth Gospel, Evidences External and Internal of its Johannean Authorship; essays by Ezra Abbot, Andrew P. Peabody and Bishop Lightfoot," 1891; and "Introduction to the Johannine Writings," by Paton J. Gloag, D.D., 1891. Other works are scarcely less valuable. I mention the following which, if accessible, should be consulted: The commentaries on John of Godet, Westcott, Weiss, and Plummer (Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges); the Introductions to the New Testament of Weiss, Salmon and Dods; Weiss's "Life of Christ," chapters V., VI., and VII.; and a series of articles begun in *The Contemporary Review*, September 1891, and in *The Expositor*, November 1891, and reproduced in *The Magazine of Christian Literature* beginning with October 1891.

TOPICS FOR INVESTIGATION.

I. Make an analysis of the gospel of John. It is necessary to distinguish between epitomizing and analyzing. Epitomizing is a mechanical process by compression; it simply eliminates words and reduces bulk. Analyzing is a chemical process by which the constituent elements of motive, argumentation and logic are discovered. What may be regarded as the theme of the book? What does it attempt to show, or prove? What are its natural divisions? To analyze upon the basis of geographical or chronological divisions is to fail of the thought-element in the book. The analysis should spring from the nature of the narrative.

II. Compare the gospel of John with the synoptic record. It would be well to notice first the differences in literary form, including both the structure of the whole, as brought out in the analysis, and also the differences in striking words and phrases. Then compare them in their agreements in recorded incidents, in their omissions and their apparent contradictions. Compare them, as they usually are compared, in respect to their "differences as to the place and form of our Lord's teaching, and

differences as to the view which is given of his Person." Chapter V., section II. of Westcott's "Introduction to the Study of the Gospels" will be found helpful on this subject.

III. Examine the external evidence for the genuineness and authenticity of John's gospel. The student must remember that "genuineness" refers to the question of authorship and "authenticity" refers purely to credibility. Who wrote the book? When this question is conclusively answered, the authorship is established. But there remain still the questions, Was the author in a position to know the facts which he states? and, Was he sufficiently free from prejudice or bias to relate them without alteration? External evidence is evidence drawn from sources outside of the book itself. A search for this evidence will lead the student to an examination of the writings of the church fathers and all extant literature bearing upon the subject, particularly in the second century. While this evidence has been collected and sifted and weighed again and again, yet in order to know its value, the student must test it for himself. He should, if the books are accessible, look at all the quotations which his guides adduce in their original setting. An excellent translation of the church fathers will be found in the series now appearing from the publishing house of The Christian Literature Company, "The Ante-Nicene Fathers" having already appeared, and "The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers" now appearing.

IV. Examine the internal evidence for the genuineness and authenticity of John's gospel. This evidence is to be found in the book itself. Do the characteristics of the narrative show that it was written by a Jew, by one who lived or had lived in Palestine, by one who had seen the events which he describes, and are there indications that one of the apostles wrote it? If so, which one? Answers to these questions can be legitimately sought within the book itself.

V. The evidential value of the epistles of John to the authenticity of the fourth Gospel. When the epistles of John are called into court, the critic must first know their worth. He must therefore examine their claims for acceptance as genuine writings of the apostle. When their genuineness is

established then they should be compared in style, structure and subject matter with the Gospel. Bishop Westcott's "The Epistles of St. John," 2d ed., 1886, will be found helpful.

VI. Compare the gospel of John with the Apocalypse. This topic of investigation demands first an examination of the genuineness of the Apocalypse.¹ The date of its composition must be at least approximately fixed in view of all the existing phenomena. The history of its higher criticism through all the centuries must be scanned. Its style, grammatical and rhetorical, must be compared with that of the Gospel; and then the question must be satisfactorily answered whether the two documents could have originated in the same mind and, if so, what theory consistent with all the facts known will satisfactorily account for their differences. The student will be helped by Simcox's "The Revelation of St. John the Divine" in the Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges.

VII. Write a biography of John the evangelist. This will involve, not only an examination of the data concerning John to be found in the New Testament, with a careful weighing of all the inferences that may be legitimately deduced therefrom, but also a thorough investigation of the claims which have been made from the scant testimony of Papias to the existence of a presbyter John, and his subsequent identification with the evangelist, and also a searching scrutiny of the evidence for the Ephesian residence of the evangelist and his absorption of Greek philosophy and Greek culture sufficient to enable him to write the fourth Gospel.

¹ The recent partition theories of the origin of the Apocalypse are described in an article, "Recent Theories of the Origin of the Apocalypse," published in *The Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. X., Part I., 1891. The author, Rev. E. C. Moore, of Providence, R. I., was granted the degree of Ph. D. by Brown University on the basis of scholarship shown in this article.